

# ELECTRONIC COMMUNICATION POLICY

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This is Catawba County's policy with regard to all electronic communication (telephone, e-mail, Internet, fax, pager, radio, etc.) by County employees. This policy is developed for the security and integrity of the employees and the County.

## **Responsibility:**

**User/Employee:** Employees are provided with a variety of electronic communication methods to increase productivity in job performance. Employees are reminded that all electronic communications equipment is the property of Catawba County. It is the responsibility of every employee to insure that all communication over County property assigned to them is legal, ethical, responsible and appropriate regardless of its origin. The County uses an Internet filter designed to block access to inappropriate websites. This technology does not alleviate the employee of their responsibility as stated above. Further, the available filter technology cannot detect an inappropriate attachment to an email. Examples of inappropriate Internet use include, but are not limited to, pornography, gambling, chat rooms, racial, ethnic or religious hate sites that would violate any employee's rights under Title VII or any other Catawba County policy that may relate to appropriate workplace conduct or behavior. While many sites are not electronically blocked, access to personal interest web sites should be limited as defined below.

Employees should not violate the County Code with regard to conflict of interest, solicitation, violation of co-workers' religious freedom, or harassment of co-workers through electronic media. Electronic messages should not be intercepted or otherwise tampered with by individual users, nor should messages be encrypted or encoded without prior approval of the supervisor.

Personal communications should not be excessive or interfere with job performance. Examples of excessive use include, but are not limited to, personal phone calls, e-mailing, or personal web traffic which lasts a significant amount of time during work hours; accessing personal interest web sites or bidding on E-Bay items, etc, at short but frequent intervals which disrupts the workday, consistently forwarding jokes, pictures, religious messages, etc. Any and all fees/charges incurred from personal use of equipment must be reimbursed by the employee.

**Department Head/Supervisor/Information Technology Center:** It is the responsibility of Department Directors and supervisors to support and administer this policy and to ensure employee knowledge of, and compliance with, the principles outlined in this policy. In addition, it is the responsibility of Department Directors to develop, inform and administer any additional policies/protocols regarding the transmittal of confidential or otherwise sensitive information specific to their department's operations. It is the Information Technology Center's responsibility to maintain passwords and codes.

## **Access/Ownership of Information:**

Catawba County provides communication services to employees for governmental purposes. All electronic communications are the property of the County. The use of passwords does not imply privacy or confidentiality, and all passwords must be turned over to the County immediately upon request. The County has the authority to access all electronic information, including personal communications, at anytime, however will usually only do so given one or more of the following:

- The user leaves employment and the County needs messages pertaining to County business.
- The County is required to do so by law.
- In the course of an investigation of impropriety, suspicion of crime for which the County may be held liable, violation of County policy or breach of security of an electronic communication system.
- Suspicion that electronic media use is significantly disrupting work.

The Department Director, in consultation with the County Manager, will monitor, intercept, review, retrieve and disclose any electronic communication if they feel a need to do so.

### **E-Mail Retention and Public Information**

NCGS 121-2 (8) and 132-1 make the content of electronic mail a public record and subject to open records and retention laws. The law breaks e-mail into three general categories:

1. Temporary or transient
2. Containing information of value concerning administration, management, operations, activities, and business.
3. Personal

Temporary or transient e-mail remain public records but may be treated as having a reference or administrative value which ends when the user no longer needs the information the record contains. These messages may be erased or destroyed when the user has determined that its reference value has ended.

E-mail containing information of value concerning administration, management, operations, activities, and business, are public records. If there is another formal letter, memo, document, paper copy, etc that contains the same information as an e-mail, the e-mail may be deleted. If the e-mail is the only record containing information of value concerning administration, management, operations, activities and business, the e-mail should be printed by the originator/owner of the documents/files to which the e-mail belongs and retained by that person for as long as required by the appropriate retention schedule. Once printed and filed, the electronic copy should be deleted. Printed e-mail should be printed with transmission and receipt data (sender, recipient, date).

Personal e-mail is not a public record and should be deleted frequently.

### **Public Requests for E-mail.**

Public or media requests for e-mail should be made in writing to the County Manager or pertinent Department Director and should contain information sufficient to identify the specific e-mail sought. This will expedite the provision of the information to the requesting person. All applicable copying fees apply to requests for paper e-mail copies.

### **Policy Implementation:**

In the current e-mail system, e-mails can be stored in 5 basic locations: In-box, sent items folder, deleted messages folder, drafts, and user defined folders. The e-mail system has definable rules that govern how long an item is stored in each of these folders. To follow the retention policy, IT staff will set all users "deleted messages" and "sent items" folders to "empty" all items older than 14 days. "In-box", "drafts", and user-defined folders will not automatically be emptied. All employees should review the e-mails stored in these folders periodically and delete e-mails that are personal, temporary or transient. E-mails that contain information of value concerning administration, management, operations, activities, and business should be printed and stored in the appropriate file. Once printed and filed, the e-mail should be deleted.

The Information Technology Department will back up the e-mail system nightly, but will typically keep back-ups no longer than two weeks. This means that deleted e-mails will be completely gone and no longer restorable after two weeks.

### **Consequences:**

Violation of this policy may result in termination of system access, possible disciplinary action up to and including dismissal, and criminal charges where appropriate.